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SPENSER AND LUCRETIUS

BY EDWIN GREENLAW

The main elements in Spenser's philosophy are derived, as has long been known, from Plato and from Renaissance developments of Platonic doctrine from Ficino to Castiglione. The grounds for this influence are apparent. Plato's keen sense of the unseen world, his doctrine of ideas or pre-existent forms, his conception that beauty, justice, temperance, and the like, manifested in earthly forms and actions, are but shadows of realities unseen except through mystic contemplation, were all influences to which the genius of Spenser responded with the utmost sensitiveness. What is more, this philosophy suited his conception of the high function of poetry, and enabled him to lift his allegory out of the scholastic desert into which allegory had fallen and to give it living truth and beauty. Therefore we find not merely abstract virtues and ideals of conduct made concrete in the stories of the *Faerie Queene* but a searching analysis of men and measures of his time, of the destinies of England itself, seen through the magic glass which could reveal them *sub specie aeternitatis*. His epic, chief expression of his spirit, was the greatest exemplar of its time of the conception that high poetry derives its authority because it is philosophy teaching by example.

Spenser's Platonism, therefore, long recognized, and in recent years extended by studies in his allegories of the life of his time, forms a most important approach to the understanding of his mind. But there was another philosophy, not of conduct and policy but of external nature, which formed another element in the range of his interests. It dealt not with the supersensual kingdom with which men should establish relations but with the physical realm that hedges man about with a different sort of divinity. It flatly denied the supernatural, the realm of the Platonic ideas; denied all mysticism, all revealed religion. It found its supreme expression, up to the advent of modern science, in Lucretius. It was closely akin, ready to establish fruitful contacts, with the new science which in Copernicus, in Galileo, in Newton, and ultimately in Darwin and his followers, was to transform modern life and

much of its thought. It was well known in Spenser's time. Lucretius is included in all the lists which the Elizabethan critics were so fond of making, as the chief example of the poet whose *métier* is natural philosophy. It would be strange if Spenser, whose learning was so extensive, whose interest in philosophy and its relation to poetry was so keen, and whose mind was so sensitive to all the varied intellectual currents of his time, had not been influenced by this inquiry into the nature of things.

In a recent essay¹ I suggested that the new scientific scepticism was probably more influential in the later English Renaissance than has heretofore been supposed, and that in Spenser, for example, is a considerable body of material showing an interest in the relation of man to nature. In a good deal of this he followed Plato, as was to be expected. His was by no means an experimental mind in the sense of one reaching out to realms of knowledge before untraveller. But the fact that so great a body of his poetry is concerned with this province is itself significant of the movement that was gaining immense momentum in the latter part of the sixteenth century. In the present essay I shall discuss only a part of this nature philosophy, but a part that is important not only for its extent but because it has been singularly neglected. For Spenser knew *De Rerum Natura* not merely as a body of great poetry from which he might, like his contemporaries in all the flowery fields of literature, sip honey—

floriferis ut apes in saltibus omnia libant—

but as a source of philosophy which he annexed as a province of his mind.

Besides the *Hymnes*, which are purely philosophical poems, and besides the philosophical elements held in solution throughout the *Faerie Queene*, there are two passages of considerable length that are closely related to each other in thought and that have only the most casual relation to the purely narrative parts of the *Faerie Queene*. In these two passages the chief interest is scientific in the sense that it has to do with the nature of things. The theme is closely linked with one of the great aspects of Renaissance thought, the idea of mutability. And the chief source of the two

¹ "Spenser's Influence on *Paradise Lost*," *Studies in Philology*, July, 1920, xvii, 320-359.

passages is Lucretius. That Spenser was acquainted with *De Rerum Natura* has long been known. Besides a considerable number of allusions, pointed out by editors from Upton's time down, there is the prayer of the lover in the Temple of Venus (iv. x. 44-47), four stanzas translated directly from the invocation to Venus at the beginning of the Latin poem. It is this Venus, maker of all the world who daily renews the life of all things, dweller also and mistress in the Garden of the Universe, that enables Spenser in a series of related passages to convert a mass of scientific theory into the uses of his allegorical method. The fascination which the story of Venus and Adonis had for Spenser, proved by his constant use of it, and the idea of Venus as practically identical with Nature, the source of life, are indicative of an intellectual interest much deeper than mere convention.² In the description of the Garden of Adonis, and in the two cantos of *Mutability* we find an extended exposition of the origin of life and the structure of the universe, with certain applications to human affairs.

The Garden of Adonis

In the first of the two passages I have mentioned (*F. Q.* III. vi), Spenser tells of the first seminary of all things that are born to live and die according to their kinds. Old Genius is the porter

² Part of this interest is connected with his study of Chaucer, to whose influence he pays tribute, in another connection, in terms translated from Lucretius' praise of his master Epicurus. But besides the influence of Chaucer on the *Shepheards Calender* and on Spenser's story of Cambello, it is also manifest in some features of the *Mutability* fragment. Here Spenser speaks of the description of Nature as something that even Chaucer dared not undertake, referring his readers to Alane's *Plaint of Kinde*. The theme of Venus—Nature is also combined with his interest in Isis, also connected with the idea of generation. Egyptian theories of reproduction were accessible to him in Plutarch's treatise of Isis and Osiris and elsewhere. For example, Apuleius says that he gained back his human shape through the intervention of Isis as goddess of fecundity. In xi. 47 (Adlington's translation) Isis is addressed as similar to Ceres, origin of fruitful things, and Venus, "who in the beginning of the world didest cople together all kinds of thinges with an engendred love, and by an eternall propagation of humaine kinde," and also Proserpine, having power "to stoppe and put away the invasion of hegges and ghosts." The entire passage reminds one of the prayer to Venus, and the story of the Golden Ass is also, of course, a form of Pythagorism.

of the Garden, attended by a thousand thousand naked babes who seek to be attired in fleshly weeds. Such as eternal fate has ordained he clothes with sinful mire and sends forth until the time of death, when they return and are again planted in the Garden for a thousand years. During this interval they forget that they have ever seen corruption and mortal pain, and then are clad with other hues and are sent once more into the changeful world. This doctrine of the pre-existence of souls, and of the return of souls after a period of forgetfulness, is of course Pythagorean. Spenser makes use, I believe, of passages from the *Republic* and the *Timaeus* of Plato, and of the exposition of Pythagorean philosophy in the fifteenth book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The *Republic* passage, from the end of the tenth book, is the well-known allegory of Er. The idea of a Genius or deity presiding over the birth of mortals; the thousands of souls seeking birth; the conception of Fate or Necessity as choosing those who were to be, in Spenser's phrase, "clothed in sinful mire"; the return of the souls after a period of mortal life,—are parallels between the two allegories not without meaning. But even more significant is Plato's insistence on the danger of sin, which Spenser repeats several times, and his idea that those who were returning from a period of earthly existence wore a travel-stained appearance and were glad to go to the "meadow" where they took up quarters until time for their return to another mortal existence. Plato's idea is of a world of the dead, with souls passing and repassing on their way to and from this shadowy existence, but it is not far from his conception of the "meadow" and the river of forgetfulness to Spenser's idea of plants growing in a garden with no recollection of earthly corruption and mortal pain.

In the *Timaeus*, also, Spenser found this Pythagorean doctrine, though the account of the origin of life there given bears little resemblance to the one developed in the *Faerie Queene*. Two passages from Ovid are more important. In the first (*Met.* i. 370 ff.), we are told that while men and women sprang from the stones cast behind them by Deucalion and Pyrrha, animals were brought forth spontaneously by the earth under the influence of the sun. "The fruitful seeds of things, nourished by the enlivening soil, as in the womb of a mother, grew, and in lapse of time assumed shape." This Ovid illustrates by a comparison with the Nile. When the river has forsaken the oozy fields and the fresh

mud is heated in the ethereal sun, the laborers find many animals, some at the moment of formation and some still imperfect; often one part is animated while the other is still coarse earth.³ The idea is somewhat similar to Lucretius' account of the generation of organic life, as we shall see later.⁴ With the exposition of Pythagorean doctrine in the fifteenth book of the *Metamorphoses*, however, we return to the sort of thing Plato had set forth in his allegory of Er. The influence of this passage on Spenser I shall discuss later in this essay. It is sufficient to remark here that his main indebtedness to Plato and Ovid is in the doctrine of the re-appearance of souls upon earth at intervals separated by a sojourn in a garden of death and life. This conception of the garden is supplemented by Spenser's statement about the two walls, one of iron and the other of gold, with the two gates of death and life, an old idea here related to Er's account of the passages between the earth and the abode of the dead. These walls of the universe have suggested the frequent references in Lucretius to the *moenia mundi* noted by Upton and others, although the philosophy of Lucretius is flatly opposed to any doctrine of pre-existence of souls and their rebirth after stated intervals.⁵

³ Spenser uses this simile, also as a simile, when speaking of the brood of Error in *F. Q.*, I. i. 21.

⁴ The idea is not original with either Ovid or Lucretius, of course. Empedocles, for example, held that the vegetable world first came into existence. Afterwards single limbs, heads, and the like, sprang from earth. Some of these fragmentary creatures were bound together by friendship while others were driven to and fro in a solitary condition, unable to gain a foothold on the shore of life. As a result all kinds of monsters came into being, but soon disappeared, since only those which showed "inner harmony" could procreate and so survive.

⁵ The references to the walls of the world are very frequent in Lucretius, as it was by this means that he distinguished between the created universe and the void, or chaos. He frequently says that the "gate of death" is never closed, but here he refers to the coming destruction of the world. See especially I. 1102-1112:

ne volucris ritu flammaram moenia mundi
diffugiant subito magnum per inane soluta . . .
nam quacumque prius de parti corpora desse
constitues, haec rebus erit pars ianua leti,
hac se turba foras dabit omnis materiae.

See also II. 1148-1149:

sic igitur magni quoque circum moenia mundi
expugnata dabunt labem putrisque ruinas.

We come now to certain resemblances in idea and phrase which seem to form the connecting link between Spenser's adaptation of these conceptions and his use of Lucretius' doctrine of the first-beginnings of things. In the Garden of Venus, Spenser says,

There is the first seminary
Of all things that are born to live and dye,
According to their kynds. (III, vi. 30)

With this we may couple what he says, a moment later, about Time as the enemy of all things that grow in the Garden, and compare Lucretius I. 225-229:

praeterea quaecumque vetustate amovet aetas,
si penitus peremit consumens materiem omnem,
unde animale genus generatim in lumina vitae
redducit Venus, aut reductum daedala tellus
unde alit atque auget generatim pabula praebens?

The explanation of the origin of organic life is very similar in the two poets. Spenser first speaks of the endless progeny of weeds that bud and blossom in the garden of Dame Nature (xxx). No gardener is needed to take care of these, or of the souls that are also growing in the garden waiting for the time when they are to be clothed in earthly weeds (xxxii-xxxiv):

Ne needs there Gardiner to sett or sow,
To plant or prune; for of their owne accord
All things, as they created were, doe grow, . . .
Ne doe they need with water of the ford,

But this and other similar passages have little reference to Spenser's conception of the Garden. The gate of death, to Spenser, is for individuals, not for the universe. Lucretius implies a gate of birth in several places, for example in I. 167 ff., where he is speaking of the "begetting bodies," *genitalia corpora*. Each thing is born and goes forth into the borders of light out of that in which resides its matter and first bodies:

at nunc seminibus quia certis quaeque creantur,
inde enascitur atque oras in luminis exit,
materies ubi inest cuiusque et corpora prima.

And there is what might be regarded as a doctrine of rebirth in the passage in which Lucretius is distinguishing between the four elements and the first-beginnings of things (I. 767-768):

alternis gignuntur enim mutantque colorem
et totam inter se naturam tempore ab omni.

This is not rebirth in the Pythagorean sense, however.

Or of the clouds, to moysten their roots dry;
 For in themselves eternall moisture they imply.
 Infinite shapes of creatures there are bred,
 And uncouth formes, which none yet ever knew;
 And every sort is in a sondry bed
 Sett by itselfe, and ranckt in comely rew;
 Some fitt for reasonable sowles t'indew;
 Some made for beasts, some made for birds to weare;
 And all the fruitfull spawne of fishes hew
 In endlesse rancks along enraunged were,
 That seemd the Ocean could not containe them there.

With this compare the account of the origin of species given by Lucretius. In the first book (188 ff.) we are told that all things grow step by step, as is natural, from a fixed seed, and increase in size and are fed out of their own matter:

omnia quando
 paulatim crescunt, ut par est, semine certo
 crescentesque genus servant; ut noscere possis
 quicque sua de materia grandescere alique.

This last line is very similar to Spenser's

For in themselves eternall moisture they imply.

The fullest treatment of the theme, however, is in the fifth book. Here (783 ff.) we learn that in the beginning earth gave forth all kinds of herbage, flowery meadows, trees and the like, and after that gave birth to the races of mortal creatures. The passage is too long for quotation. Significant details are the reference to the earth as the universal mother: the race of fowls and the various birds, the different animals, the races of mortal men. What he says on the origin of man is especially close to Spenser, who alters in extraordinary fashion the Platonic and Christian idea of souls coming from a spiritual realm to inhabit mortal bodies to a conception as materialistic as that of Lucretius himself. For the chief point about the entire passage in Spenser is that these souls grow in the Garden of Dame Nature in precisely the same manner as the flowers and trees and all the animals. The only supernatural agencies are Nature herself, personified in much the same fashion as Lucretius, with all his denial of the supernatural in life, personifies her, and the porter, Old Genius. Even this vague supernaturalism drops out of sight in the thirty-fifth stanza, about the infinite

shapes of creatures, including monsters as well as men and the animals that survived, that grow in the Garden like plants springing from the earth. With this compare Lucretius v. 795-819. It follows, he says, that with good reason the earth has acquired the name of mother, since all things have been produced out of her. In the first age, when mortal men sprang from the heat and moisture in the fields, wombs would grow attached to the earth by roots, and when these were opened in the fulness of time nature would cause the earth to yield a liquid most like to milk (the "eternal moisture" of Spenser), while to the children would be supplied food from the earth, raiment from heat, and a bed rich in abundance of soft down in the grass. Like the Garden of Adonis, the earth then knew no severe cold or excessive heat; it was, as Spenser says, "a joyous Paradise."⁶ As to the monsters, Spenser's

Uncouth formes, which none yet ever knew,—

Lucretius says (v. 837-856) that the earth then essayed to produce many monsters, things coming up with strange face and limbs, the man-woman, some things deprived of feet, others lacking hands, or dumb, or blind, or with limbs so bound that they could not live. All these the earth produced in vain, so that many races of living things died out, being unable to beget and continue their breed.⁷

⁶ linquitur ut merito maternum nomen adepta
 terra sit, e terra quoniam sunt cuncta creata . . .
 tum tibi terra dedit primum mortalia saecula.
 multus enim calor atque umor superabat in arvis.
 hoc ubi quaeque loci regio opportuna dabatur,
 crescebant uteri terram radicibus apti;
 quos ubi tempore maturo patefecerat aestus
 infantum fugiens umorem aurasque petessens,
 convertibat ibi natura foramini terrae
 et sucum venis coquebat fundere apertis
 consimilem lactis . . .
 terra cibum pueris, vestem vapor, herba cubile
 praebebat multa et molli lanugine abundans.
 at novitas mundi nec frigora dura ciebat
 nec nimios aestus nec magnis viribus auras.

⁷ Multaque tum tellus etiam portenta creare
 conatast mira facie membrisque coorta,
 androgynum . . .
 orba pedum partim, manuum viduata vicissim,

A passage in the second book appears also to have been used. It will be remembered that Spenser lays special stress on the fact that no Gardener is needed, that all things grow of their own accord; thus he gets away from supernaturalism as completely as Lucretius himself. He also, it will be noticed, insists on the *order* of Nature. Each kind of creature, for example, is set in a separate bed, ranked in comely row, some for men (reasonable creatures), others for beasts, for birds, and for all the fruitful spawn of fishes, so innumerable that it seemed the ocean could not contain them. On this compare Lucretius II. 1077-1092, where we learn that Nature, free at once and rid of her haughty lords (i. e. all supernaturalism) is seen to do all things spontaneously, of herself alone. This spontaneity does not mean absence of order, for in the sum of all there is no one thing begotten single in its kind but all things are in classes. In one sort (i. e. Spenser's "sondry bed, ranckt in comely row") are men, in another the beasts, in others the mute shoals of scaly creatures and all bodies of fowls. For all these, we are told, the deep-set boundary mark of life awaits. The ideas are the same as Spenser's; the examples are also the same, and human beings are included with other forms of organic life; the universe is filled with creatures awaiting birth. The stanzas in Spenser (xxxiv, xxxv) I have already quoted; in view of the importance of the parallel I give also the passage from Lucretius:

Huc accedit ut in summa res nulla sit una,
 unica quae gignatur et unica solaque crescat,
 quin aliquoiu' siet saeculi permultaque eodem
 sint genere. in primis animalibus, inclute Memmi,
 inuenies sic montivagum genus esse ferarum,
 sic hominum genitam prolem, sic denique mutas
 squamigerum pecudes et corpora cuncta volantum.
 quae propter caelum simili ratione fatendumst
 terramque et solem lunam mare, cetera quae sunt,
 non esse unica, sed numero magis innumerali;
 quandoquidem vitae depactus terminus alte

Note 7 continued—

muta sine ore etiam, sine voltu caeca reperta,
 vinctaque membrorum per totum corpus adhaesu . . .
 cetera de genere hoc monstra ac portenta creabat,
 nequiquam, quoniam natura absterruit auctum
 nec potuere cupitum aetatis tangere florem . . .
 multa tum interiisse animantum saecula necessest
 nec potuisse propagando procudere prolem.

tam maret haec et tam nativo corpore constant,
 quam genus omne quod hic generatimst rebus abundans.
 Quae bene cognita si teneas, natura videtur
 libera continuo dominis privata superbis
 ipsa sua per se sponte omnia dis agere expers.

The Atomic Theory in Spenser

The first part of Spenser's account of the Garden of Adonis is, therefore, made up of ideas partly Platonic and partly Lucretian. It would be going too far to insist overmuch on the Lucretian element in this passage. There is more or less confusion in Spenser's mind between the Platonic idea of the pre-existence of forms, implied in the growth in the Garden, and the pure Lucretian atomism that is the basis of the passage beginning with stanza xxxvi. The Garden is both the Universe, or created world, and a place set apart, in which the forms of all living things develop prior to their appearance on earth. But with his doctrine of chaos as the source of the substances out of which all things are formed, and of the stream of matter issuing thence, we come to a statement, condensed into remarkably effective verse, of the ideas that form the foundation itself of the Lucretian system.

According to Lucretius,⁸ some bodies are the first-beginnings of things; the remaining bodies are formed from a union (*concilium*) of these first-beginnings.⁹ Nothing is ever begotten out of nothing by supernatural power. The laws of nature determine what each thing can do and what it cannot do. Thus to Lucretius the existence of these unchangeable substances and their operation independent of supernatural aid is connected with the idea of a definite order and fixed law in nature. His second proposition is that nothing is ever annihilated, but all things on their dissolution go

⁸ My summary in this paragraph owes much to John Masson's *The Atomic Theory of Lucretius*, London, 1884, especially pp. 1-83; and to H. A. J. Munro's edition, for text and also for the notes to passages cited. I have used the fourth edition, London, 1886.

⁹ The terms used by Lucretius are of interest. He does not use "atoms" but, most frequently, a word or phrase that Munro translates "first-beginnings." He calls them *primordia*, or *rerum primordia*. Synonyms are *materies*, *corpora prima*, or *corpora genitalia* or *corpora rerum*. At times we find *semina rerum* or *semina* alone. Munro, II. 34, note on Lucretius I. 55.

back into the first-beginnings.¹⁰ Next, Lucretius explains the existence of "void." This void exists mixed up with the substances of bodies, as well as in the universe outside the created world. Thus all nature, whether the world or the realm of chaos, is made up of first-beginnings and void. In this philosophy Lucretius opposes Aristotle, who regarded the universe as depending upon a center which was the goal of all motion, and Plato, who in the *Timaeus* insists over and over that all the elements were used in the creation, leaving no part of any of them out of which another such world might be created, and also guaranteeing the safety of the world and its freedom from decay.¹¹ Far from thinking that all the elements were used in the creation of the world, Lucretius maintains that continual waste goes on, so that the world is fed by fresh streams of atoms flowing in from the infinite void. If this supply of matter should lose its way in the void and fail to replenish the needs of the world, chaos would result.

The general resemblances between this theory and Spenser's explanation of the "substances" of which all things are made are at once apparent. Spenser tells us (xxxvi) that

in the wide wombe of the world there lyes
In hatefull darknes and in deepe horrore
An huge eternall Chaos, which supplyes
The substaunces of natures fruitful progenyes,

¹⁰ There is a distinction between these first-beginnings and the "bodies" into which Plato says, in the *Timaeus*, all things are to be resolved. For Plato is thinking of the four elements, a view which Lucretius devotes much space to repudiating. It is clear, as will appear below, that Spenser's "substances" correspond to the Lucretian physics, not to the Platonic. The doctrines of the existence of the four elements and of the indestructibility of matter are, of course, very old, going back to Thales, for example. Aristotle adopted the view, saying that matter is neither generated nor destroyed; he did not, however, follow the atomists, and his conception of the universe, like that of Plato, was utterly different from theirs.

¹¹ In contrast with this, I have already called attention to Lucretius' constant sense of the Gate of Death threatening one day destruction to the world and its return to the primeval chaos. For Spenser, compare *Ruines of Rome*, xxii:

The seedes of which all thinges at first were bred
Shall in great Chaos womb againe be hid.

Milton expresses the same idea in *Paradise Lost*.

and that these are sent into the world daily to replenish it, yet the stock is not lessened nor spent. From these substances all things fetch their first being (xxxvii) and borrow matter whereof they are made. That is, they fall into certain arrangements, the Lucretian phrase for which Spenser writes that they catch form and feature, and, further, that if it were not for this constant replenishment all things would perish. On this compare Lucretius i. 958 ff., in which he speaks of the universe as infinite and filled with store of matter (*copia materiai*) which is in constant motion:

at nunc nimirum requies data principiorum
corporibus nullast. (996-997.)

This idea of ceaseless motion he repeats:

semper in adsiduo motu res quaeque geruntur
partibus e cunctis infernaque suppeditantur
ex infinito cita corpora materiai. (999-1001.)

These substances, Spenser says, are often altered to and fro, meaning, as he remarks a moment later, that they are in constant motion, not that the substances themselves change. Lucretius continues that these first-beginnings, shifting about in many ways throughout the universe, are driven at length into arrangements such as those out of which our sum of things has been formed. Thus our world is replenished, the earth renews its produce and the race of living things comes up and flourishes, all which would be impossible unless a store of matter could rise up out of infinite space from which all things make up in due season whatever has been lost. That Spenser has precisely this passage in mind will be apparent I think to any one who will compare the words of the Latin and the English poet. All things, he says,

All things from thence doe their first being fetch,
And borrow matter whereof they are made;
Which, whenas forme and feature it does ketch,
Becomes a body, and doth then invade
The state of life out of the griesly shade.
That substaunce is eterne, and bideth so;
Ne when the life decayes and forme does fade,
Doth it consume and into nothing goe,
But chaunged is, and often altred to and froe.

The substaunce is not chaunged nor altered,
But th' only forme and outward fashion;

For every substaunce is conditioned
 To chaunge her hew, and sondry formes to don,
 Meet for her temper and complexion:
 For formes are variable, and decay
 By course of kinde and by occasion.

On which compare Lucretius 1025-1037:

sed quia multa modis multis mutata per omne
 ex infinito vexantur percita plagis,
 omne genus motus et coetus experiundo
 tandem deveniunt in talis disposituras,
 qualibus haec rerum consistit summa creata,
 et multos etiam magnos servata per annos
 ut semel in motus coniectast convenientis,
 efficit ut largis avidum mare fluminis undis
 integrent amnes et solis terra vapore
 fota novet fetus summissaque gens animantum
 floreat et vivant labentes aetheris ignes;
 quod nullo facerent pacto, nisi materiai
 ex infinito suboriri copia posset,
 unde amissa solent reparare in tempore quaeque.

Again and again, he says, he must repeat that many bodies (substances) must rise up; there is need of an infinite supply of matter on all sides:

quare etiam atque etiam suboriri multa necessest,
 et tamen ut plagae quoque possint suppetere ipsae,
 infinita opus est vis undique materiai.²²

That by "substaunce" Spenser means the Lucretian atom is proved by the distinction he makes between these first-beginnings or materials of things and the "forms" which result from combinations in this substance. The substance must "catch" form and feature before it invades the world of light. When "form" fades, the "substaunce" is not consumed but is merely "altered to and fro." Spenser's statement,—

²²Lucretius speaks of this constant replenishing in many places and with almost the same phraseology, so it is not surprising that Spenser, even if he was reading *De Rerum Natura* for pleasure and not as a philosophical poem, was impressed by it. Compare, for example, the compact statement in V. 192-194:

ut non sit mirum si in talis disposituras
 deciderunt quoque et in talis venere meatus,
 qualibus haec rerum geritur nunc summa novando.

For every *substaunce* is conditioned
 To *chaunge* her *hew*, and *sondry formes* to *don*,
 Meet for her temper and complexion,—

imitates, almost verbally, Lucretius II. 1002-1006:

nec sic interemit mors res ut *materiali*
corpora conficiat, sed coetum dissupat ollis,
 inde aliis aliud coniungit; et effit ut *omnes*
res ita convertant formas mutantque colores
 et capiant sensus et puncto tempore reddant.

Or once more, compare the passage (I. 700 ff.) in which Lucretius devotes much space to disproving the theory that the ultimate source is fire or water or compounds of these or of all four elements, and especially his summary. For things (forms), he says, are begotten time about and interchange *color* (Spenser's "hew") and their whole nature without ceasing,—

alternis *gignuntur* enim *mutantque colorem*
 et totam inter se naturam tempore ab omni. (767-768.)

While a little farther on we find the hint for the close of Spenser's stanza—

For formes are variable, and decay
 By course of kinde and by occasion;
 And that faire flowre of beautie fades away,
 As doth the lily fresh before the sunny ray,—

a passage redolent of imagery often used by him, in the lines—

nam quodcumque suis mutatum finibus exit,
 continuo hoc mors est illius quod fuit ante. (792-793.)

How closely Spenser studied even the phraseology of Lucretius is also illustrated by the passage already quoted in which he says that from the substances in chaos all things fetch their first being and borrow matter which when it catches form and feature

Becomes a body, and *doth then invade*
The state of life out of the griesly shade,—

on which compare—

at nunc seminibus quia certis quaeque creantur
 inde enascitur atque *oras in luminis exit*,
materies ubi inest cuisque et corpora prima. (I. 169-171.)

Finally, the ceaseless warfare between life and death, the constant succession of forms taking momentary shape out of matter that is itself imperishable, the perception of a law by which Nature preserves her own immortality while destroying the visible manifestations of it, form a sublime and solemn theme in both poets. The text may be found in the closing lines of Lucretius' second book:

tristis item vetulae vitis sator atque vietae
temporis incusat momen caelumque fatigat
nec tenet omnia paulatim tabescere et ire
ad capulum spatio aetatis defessa vetusto.

Like the sorrowful planter, contemplating the wasting away of the exhausted and shrivelled vine and comprehending not that all things are passing to the grave forspent by age, the mistress of Spenser's Garden laments the loss of her dear brood. The perception of a law of nature superior to any power of the gods to overcome is in both poets. To Lucretius, the gods are far removed from the stage on which the tragedy of earth's living forms is enacted; they have no care because they have no power. And to Spenser, while the gods look on with pity they are powerless, being themselves subject to the law that is mightier than they. Time is the great enemy to the Garden, like the *aetas* of Lucretius—

inde minutatim vires et robur adultum
frangit et in partem peiorem liquitur aetas. (1131-1132.)

So wicked Time strides through the Garden and cuts off the flowering herbs and goodly things—

And all their glory to the ground downe flings,
Where they do wither, and are fowly mard:
He flyes about, and with his flaggy winges
Beates down both leaves and buds without regard,
Ne ever pittie may relent his malice hard.

Yet pity often did the gods relent,
To see so faire thinges mard and spoiled quight;
And their great mother Venus did lament
The losse of her deare brood, her deare delight:
Her heart was pierst with pittie at the sight,
When walking through the Gardin them she saw,
Yet no'te she find redresse for such despight:
For all that lives is subject to that law;
All things decay in time, and to their end doe draw.

(xxxix-xl.)

And the complete statement of the law is the symbol of Adonis as the personification of matter, mortal yet immortal, loved by the goddess of form, triumphant so long as the boar, symbol of the forces that would bring destruction, is held in check by law—

For he [Adonis] may not
 For ever dye, and ever buried bee
 In balefull night, where all things are forgot;
 All be he subject to mortalitie,
 Yet is eterne in mutabilitie,
 And by succession made perpetuall,
 Transformed oft, and chaunged diverslie;
 For him the Father of all formes they call
 Therefore needs mote he live, that living gives to all.

(xlvi.)

Here is the adaptation of the old myth to the Lucretian philosophy from which Spenser has drawn his perception of permanence underneath all mutability. Nature dissolves everything back into the first-bodies, but does not annihilate these first-bodies, else Venus could not bring back into the light of life the race of living things—

unde animale genus generatim in lumina vitae
 reducit Venus. (I. 227-228.)

And this balance of life and death, the warfare of the death-dealing motions that cannot yet prevail, and of the spirit of life that cannot preserve the things it has brought into being, goes on unceasingly, now one and now the other seeming to have the mastery. Lucretius' words, mingled of pathos and the solemn recognition of a law that transcends individual existence, seem a chorus commenting on Spenser's allegory—

Nec superare queunt motus itaque exitiales
 perpetuo neque in aeternum sepelire salutem,
 nec porro rerum genitales auctificique
 motus perpetuo possunt servare creata.
 sic aequo geritur certamine principiorum
 ex infinito contractum tempore bellum:
 nunc hic nunc illic superant vitalia rerum
 et superantur item. miscetur funere vapor
 quem pueri tollunt visentis luminis oras;
 nec nox ulla diem neque noctem aurora secutast
 quae non audierit mixtos vagitibus aegris
 ploratus mortis comites et funeris atri. (II. 569-580.)

The Rule of Change

The second of the two cantos of Mutability is a sustained exposition of the rule of change throughout the created world. The complex structure of this exposition, being partly direct and partly varied by the use of masque, somewhat conceals its unity. The sources of the material as a whole I believe are to be found in Ovid and Lucretius.¹³ The situation, it will be remembered, is the trial of the claim of the Titan Mutability against Jove, to be decided by an appeal to Dame Nature, who is said to be above both men and gods in authority. The whole attempt of Mutability, detailed in the preceding canto and here brought to trial, may be regarded as an argument for a materialistic conception of the world as against all supernaturalism. Jove represents the idea of a superior spiritual power governing men and things; the aim of Mutability is to unseat him, to assert the rule of change in the heavens as well as on earth. Though Spenser speaks of the whole matter as a victory for Jove, it is clear both from the action and the trial that the true victory is in the assertion of a law in nature that rules gods and men alike; that this conclusion is the same as that expressed in the Adonis passage; and that the Mutability cantos, more clearly even than those with which we have been dealing thus far in this essay, are charged with true Lucretian scepticism. It is worth noting, I think, that Lucretius himself compares his attack on supernaturalism to the attempt of the Titans to cast Jove from his seat.

The canto may be summarized briefly as follows:

Following the bold attempt, detailed in the first of the two cantos, to drive Jove from his seat, the case is taken before Dame Nature. Mutability pleads, first, that Nature is the supreme ruler of the world and that Jove and his fellows who claim to be gods have no right to any part of the rule of earth or heaven. All things on earth flourish but for a time: the flowers; the beasts, massacred by men; men themselves who pass from youth to age and whose minds decay with their bodies however deemed

¹³ Todd (VII. 219) quotes Jortin's note on stanza xvii to the effect that "what follows concerning the mutability of all things may be compared with the discourse of Pythagoras upon that subject in Ovid, *Met.* xv. 165," and continues that "Spenser certainly had it in view." But this Ovidian influence goes much farther than Jortin's note indicates, and is combined with elements from Lucretius, of which he makes no mention.

immortal, all follow a course independent of the gods and subject to change. Next, it is maintained that all the physical creation is also subject to change: the elements, here regarded as the bases of things, war on each other and shift their forms; the idea that there are gods of these elements, as Vesta and Vulcan of fire, or Ops of the earth, or Juno of the air, or Neptune and the nymphs of seas and rivers, is mere superstition. To prove these things, a masque is presented, consisting of the changing seasons, who are described in Spenser's opulent style; the months, accompanied by the signs of the zodiac; and after them Day and Night, Life and Death. The Masque over, Mutability calls on Dame Nature for judgment, summing up her case in language strikingly like that of the Adonis passage, to the effect that in all creatures Change rules, since Time preys on all ceaselessly, and yet Time also changes and moves continually. Here Jove interposes that all these things are indeed true, but that Time is subject to the will of the gods, who are thus, after all, supreme. To this Mutability responds that religion may well attribute to itself things which we do not understand, and may say that these things are swayed by some supernatural power, but what we see not, who shall us persuade? Not content with this retort, she goes on to prove that the heavenly bodies, the moon, Mercury, Venus, the Sun, Mars, Saturn, and Jupiter, are all "subject eeke to this misfare" and so are mortal born, no gods at all. Even the starry sky, wizards say, is moved. So once more she calls for judgment. After long silence, Nature speaks. All things, she says, hate steadfastness, yet they are not changed from their first estate but through change dilate their being and at length returning to themselves work their own perfection by fate. Therefore Change rules not them, but they rule over change.

Now certain elements in this combined argument and masque owe much to Ovid. The masque itself as a method in the technique of what was in Spenser's time held to be epic poetry is an illustration of the influence of the pictorial style and the constant personification that made Ovid a favorite poet of that period. For example, in the second book of the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid tells how Phaeton goes to the palace of the sun to complain to his father Apollo. Phoebus is seated on a splendid throne, made of emeralds and other brilliant gems. On his right hand and on his left the Days, the Months, the Years, the Ages, and the Hours are all arranged at corresponding distances and the fresh Spring is standing crowned with a chaplet of blossoms; Summer stands naked except for garlands made of ears of corn; Autumn is besmeared with the trodden-out grapes; next comes icy Winter rough with his hoary hair. Here are many of the persons of Spenser's masque,

described in the same symbolic fashion that he loved.¹⁴ In the fifteenth book we find some of these same *dramatis personae*, this time in illustration that

omnia mutantur; nihil interit:¹⁵

All things are ever changing; nothing perishes. The soul takes on various forms. All things are flowing onward and every shape is assumed in a fleeting course. Even time is like a river, or like the changes of day and night and the stars. So also with the years: the Spring is a youth, clad in blossoms; Summer is robust and full of strength; Autumn is ripe but lacks the ardor of youth; Winter is aged, repulsive with his tremulous steps, either stript of his locks or white with those which he has. Next, our bodies change from one form to another; the helpless infant, then youth, and finally old age. So also with the elements: earth and water heavy and borne down by weight; air and fire seeking higher regions. All things are made from them and dissolve into them. Moreover, they pass into each other, as earth into water, water into air, air into fire; thence back again and the same order is unravelled. Nothing in this universe perishes, but all vary and change appearance; hence birth and death. Earth and sea mingle with each other or change places; rivers change their courses. Even the heavens and whatever is beneath them, and earth and whatever is upon it, change form. We too, who are a portion of the universe, change with it, since we are not only bodies but fleeting souls that enter into beasts and pass from one existence into another. Therefore we should not slay beasts, which doubtless contain human souls.

Now the indebtedness of Spenser to this portion of Ovid's work is apparent. The similarities not only in the personifications and other masque elements but in the general use of them, to illustrate a philosophy of change, are too numerous and too exact to be neglected. There are also one or two rather significant details, such, for example, as Spenser's complaint that the beasts are the victims of man's cruelty, two lines (stanza xix) that fit in with the idea that it is the chief purpose of Ovid's version of Pythagorean doctrine to convey. For the personifications and the pictorial and descriptive qualities of Spenser's poem, therefore; for the general impression of a rule of change; and for certain details in the

¹⁴ Upton refers only to *Met.* II. 27, the personification of the four seasons, not noting that many other of Spenser's characters are also in the company.

¹⁵ Jortin (cited Todd VII. 219) quotes this line and says that Spenser had in mind this treatment of the theme of mutability by Ovid. Upton (ib. 223) refers Spenser's twenty-fifth stanza to *Met.* xv. 239.

account, we may regard it as certain that Spenser made some use of Ovid. But there are good reasons, I think, for my belief that the influence of Lucretius is also present, and that it is more significant than the one just pointed out.

The first of these reasons is a difference in the point of view in regard to this philosophy of change. This difference is something rather difficult to prove; it is a pervasive thing, not a matter of concrete illustration. The entire purpose of the passage in Ovid, as I have already remarked, is to illustrate the idea that the souls of men pass into beasts and that therefore one should not eat animal food. No part of this philosophy finds any place in Spenser, except for his comment on the cruel fate of beasts already cited. Ovid's idea of change, moreover, is different from that of Lucretius and, I believe, from that of Spenser. For the Pythagorean passage is truly suited to the book of which it is a part. Ovid is treating of metamorphoses. The illustrations that he gives to support the idea are not used by Spenser. Change is imaged as a river flowing ever onward. Every shape is assumed in a fleeting manner. The seasons, the days, the hours, flow into one another. So also the life of man from infancy to age, from one state of consciousness to another, is imaged. A large part of the passage is devoted to sheer transformations: the hyena changing sex; the silkworm from the cocoon; the mountain changing to a volcano, and many other such examples. The natural history is that of Pliny. The general inspiration of the book, therefore, is entirely different not only from Lucretius but also from what we have found in the Adonis passage and from what we get here in the trial before Dame Nature. Ovid deals with change; Spenser and Lucretius deal with Mutability.

The second reason is that both in intellectual atmosphere and in the entire plan of Spenser's poem, including certain elements in the first of the two cantos as well as practically all of the second, the material owes a very great debt to the fifth book of *De Rerum Natura*. Near the beginning of this book Lucretius speaks once more of his master Epicurus, saying that while walking in his footsteps he follows out his reasonings and teaches in his verses the law of nature.

Cuius ego ingressus vestigia dum rationes
persequor ac doceo dictis, quo quaeque creata

foedere sint, in eo quam sit durare necessum
nec validas valeant aevi rescindere leges.¹⁶

In this passage it will be observed that Lucretius states the theme of his fifth book to be to set forth the law of all things, how necessity binds all things to continue in that law, and how impotent they are to annul the binding statutes of time. This theme is at once similar to that of the Adonis passage and dominant throughout the Mutability cantos, including the judgment given by Nature. Moreover, it is in this fifth book that Lucretius treats of the form and composition of the universe, and this is also the theme of Spenser. Once more, Lucretius compares his design, in a passage that immediately follows, to the attempt of the giants that warred on Jove, since he and all who like him seek to drive out religious superstition are thought to be atheists, whose purpose it is to displace the walls of the world and to brand immortal things in mortal speech (lines 110-121). Spenser's cantos, however disguised, are precisely such an adaptation of the old Titan myth, since the theme is the expulsion of supernaturalism by a materialistic philosophy. Furthermore, Spenser's gods, like those of Lucretius, are far removed from human affairs, living at ease, neither the makers nor the rulers of earth. This he expresses allegorically not only by the general impression of remoteness that he gives in the first canto but also by the statement that worldly affairs are entirely in the hands of Hecate, who has rule and principality under her control; of Bellona, who continually stirs up strife; and of Mutability. Even the gods, Mutability states, are of earthly birth and are mortal like all things else.

This conception of mortality, not of mere Protean shifting from shape to shape, is the point differentiating Ovid and Lucretius,

¹⁶ Lines 55-58. Spenser uses this idea of following in the footsteps of a master in his tribute to Chaucer (*F. Q.* IV. ii. 34) in the beautiful line

I follow here the footing of thy feete.

Jortin (cited Todd v. 188) correctly traces this to the invocation to Epicurus at the beginning of Book III. There are other details in that passage which Spenser drew upon for his tribute to Chaucer, such as the idea that it is through sweet infusion of Chaucer's spirit, not through vain rivalry, that he seeks to make up for what has been destroyed by "cursed Eld." To this the present passage should be added, however, since Spenser appears to have studied Book V, the most epic-like book in Lucretius, with the greatest care.

and also Ovid and Spenser. Stanza xviii tells how all that earth produces, however fair, must decay, and, being dead, must turn again into earthly slime (the first-beginnings, or "substance") out of which new creatures arise. So also, the beasts that perish, and men who pass from youth to age and then to death,—

Ne doe their bodies only flit and fly
But eek their minds (which they immortal call),—

on which it may be remarked that Lucretius' chief argument against the immortality of the soul, in his third book, is that the mind decays with the body as extreme old age comes on.

Even the topics treated in the argument, including both the speech of Mutability and the masque, are the same as in Lucretius, and are introduced in the same order. First, the elements, earth, water, air, and fire, all change and are therefore mortal (235 ff.). Even some of the details in this account are Lucretian, not Ovidian, as for example the influence of the winds on earth and water. The dependence of all creatures on air, slender source of permanent life, is the illustration used by both poets, as is also the illustration of fire, consuming himself. For the brilliant passage in which Lucretius describes the strife of the elements Spenser substitutes Ovid's idea of one element passing into another in ceaseless change.

In the long passage which follows (416 ff.) Lucretius explains the creation of the universe by the coming together of the first-beginnings of things out of chaos. As I have already shown, Spenser made extensive use of this passage in his account of the Garden of Adonis.¹⁷ Obviously, also, he had no need of an exposition of the origin of the universe in this particular place. The observation is important, for one of the striking parts of this whole treatment of the Mutability claim is that Spenser follows in chronological order the points developed in the fifth book of Lucretius, using only the ones that fit his theme.

¹⁷ The idea of Chaos as set forth by Spenser in various places is substantially the same as that of Lucretius and is entirely opposed to the theories of Aristotle and Plato. The danger of the return to Chaos and Night through abrogation of the law of Nature, an idea constantly emphasized by Lucretius, is in Spenser vii, stanza 14. But Lucretius is concerned only with the natural origins of things as opposed to supernatural fiat, and he does not set forth a definite cosmogony. In this respect Spenser differs from him, and the chief sources are to be looked for elsewhere.

Immediately following this passage we return to the sequence found in the Mutability argument. The seasons (737 ff.) pass by as in a masque: Spring and Venus go their way, decked with flowers; next Summer with parching heat, followed by Autumn, and, last of all, by Winter with his teeth chattering with cold.¹⁸ Spenser elaborates his description of the seasons, and follows the suggestion of Ovid, as we have seen, about the months, days, hours, and the like, though not even Ovid gives such detailed descriptions as we find in the English poet. But the other elements, such as Mutability's response to Jove in regard to the changes in the sun and the planets, are in Lucretius (509 ff.). Spenser seems to have based his material on a general study of the long passage in which Lucretius explains the motions of the stars.

No better indication of the fundamental relationship of Spenser's poem to Lucretius rather than to Ovid could be found than the summary of the position of Mutability which parallels the summary of the Adonis passage. As the conclusion of her case, Mutability says:

Lo! mighty mother, now be judge, and say
Whether in all thy creatures more or lesse
Change doth not raign and bear the greatest sway;
For who sees not that Time on all doth pray?
But Times do change and move continually;
So nothing heere long standeth in one stay:
Wherefore this lower world who can deny
But to be subject still to Mutability?

To this Jove responds, as already noted, that while these things are true, nevertheless the gods control Time, and thus control all the mutability found in the universe. Whereupon Mutability once more:

The things,
Which we see not how they are mov'd and swayd
Ye may attribute to your selves as Kings,
And say, they by your secret powre are made:
But what we see not, who shall us perswade?

¹⁸ Spenser follows Lucretius verbally here. Compare
hiemps sequitur crepitans hanc dentibus algu

(747)

and

Winter . . .

Chattering his teeth for cold that did him chill.

(xxxi)

Ovid does not use this detail.

Here is, of course, a denial of any supernatural power in the world, and it is at once followed up by the proofs that even the heavenly bodies are ruled by the same law of change, that they are mortal, and are not the supernatural "animals" of Plato's *Timaeus*.

All this material follows closely that part of the fifth book in which Lucretius used to the utmost his splendid powers in order to overthrow the superstition that is based on ignorance. Two passages are of particular importance. In the first, the ideas suggest Mutability's summary that Time rules all, yet Time itself changes and is subject to the power of change:

mutat enim mundi naturam totius aetas
ex alioque alius status excipere omnia debet,
nec manet ulla sui similis res: omnia migrant,
omnia commutat natura et vertere cogit.
namque aliut putrescit et aevo debile languet,
porro aliut clarescit et e contemptibus exit.
sic igitur mundi naturam totius aetas
mutat et ex alio terram status excipit alter. (828-835.)

This parallel appears to me to be important not only because the ideas expressed in it are precisely the same as those in Spenser, and because both in Lucretius and in Spenser they are summaries of considerable bodies of material, but even more because of the fact that the order is still chronological. It is as if Spenser having read the fifth book and been impressed by it, went deliberately through it and selected, in the order in which he came upon the passages, those elements that seemed to him at once to fit his purposes and to summarize the philosophy in which he was interested. Nor is this all. Jove's response that nevertheless the gods rule Time and therefore rule all by their secret power; Mutability's rejoinder that this is mere superstition, not to be believed by those who are not willing to do without evidence, and that the idea that the heavenly bodies are gods, controlling human destinies, results only from the ignorance of mortals unable to explain natural phenomena,—all this is a condensation of the passage in Lucretius in which he treats of the changes in the heavenly bodies plus the vitriolic denunciation of the hapless race of men who because they could not understand the system of heaven and the different seasons of the year would seek a refuge in handing over all things to the gods, submitting to be guided by their nod. So they placed in heaven, he continues, the abodes of the gods, because night and

moon are seen to roll through heaven, day and night and night's austere constellations and night wandering meteors of the sky and flying bodies of flame and all the phenomena of the air. So when we turn our gaze on the heavenly quarters of the great upper world, fear comes, the fear that we may haply find the power of the gods to be unlimited:

praeterea caeli rationes ordine certo
 et varia annorum cernebant tempora verti
 nec poterant quibus id fieret cognoscere causas.
 ergo perfugium sibi habebant omnia divis
 tradere et illorum nutu facere omnia flecti.
 in caeloque deum sedes et templa locarunt,
 per caelum volvi quia nox et luna videtur,
 luna dies et nox et noctis signa severa
 noctivagaeque faces caeli flammaeque volantes,
 nubila sol imbres nix venti fulmina grando
 et rapidi fremitus et murmura magna minarum.
 O genus infelix humanum, talia divis
 cum tribuit facta atque iras adiunxit acerbis!
 quantos tum gemitus ipsi sibi, quantaque nobis
 volnera, quas lacrimas peperere minoribu' nostris! . . .
 nam cum suspicimus magni caelestia mundi
 templa, super stellisque micantibus aethera fixum,
 et venit in mentem solis lunaeque viarum,
 tunc aliis oppressa malis in pectora cura
 illa quoque expergefactum caput erigere infit,
 nequae forte deum nobis immensa potestas
 sit, vario motu quae candida sidera verset.
 temptat enim dubiam mentem rationis egestas,
 ecquaenam fuerit mundi genitalis origo,
 et simul ecquae sit finis, quoad moenia mundi
 solliciti motus hunc possint ferre laborem. (1183 ff.)

To our previous knowledge of Spenser's intellectual interests, therefore, should be added a body of material that is both extensive and important. It differs from the Platonism which has hitherto been regarded as his chief philosophical equipment, a fact which adds greatly to its significance. It has high imaginative value, is expressed in verse that ranks with the best of his work, and points to an intense intellectual interest at some period or periods in his life in a field of thought with which his name is not usually connected. It also adds new interest to the mystery surrounding the fragment of *Mutability* to see that though indeed the great knights of the epic do not appear in it and it tells no story that

seems to fit Spenser's general scheme, yet it is intimately related to a unique and powerful passage in the manuscript that he took from his Irish exile to be published in London, while it is also related, by the song of the Irish rivers, to the poem into which he poured much of the disillusion that that London experience brought him. The fourth book of the *Faerie Queene*, marking the continuation of the great project, contains the tribute to Chaucer, which owes several details to Lucretius, and also the translation of the hymn to Venus. To go farther than this is not possible with the evidence that we now have. Spenser was like Plato in the wide range of his interests and in his indifference to forming a consistent philosophical system.¹⁹ The Lucretian element in his work is only another bit of evidence of his intellectual curiosity. That it is sincere, that it is the product of much study, I believe to be borne out by the evidence I have given and by other things as well. For with all his idealism, Spenser had a keen sense of fact. Much of the political scepticism of his day found a way into his pages. It is impossible that he should not have been affected by the scientific scepticism as well.

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¹⁹ Jowett remarks (intro. to *Timaeus*, *Dialogues* III, 565): "It has not been observed that the confusion [i. e. in the theories set forth in *Timaeus*] partly arises out of the elements of opposing philosophies which are preserved in him. He holds these in solution, he brings them into relation with one another, but he does not perfectly harmonize them. They are part of his own mind, and he is incapable of placing himself outside of them and criticizing them. They grow as he grows."